"The failure of Western models of economic relations and governance gave rise to calls for authentic, culturally appropriate alternatives in Central Asia—and the tapping of anti-American themes. In their recruitment efforts, [Islamists used] Soviet-era anti-Americanism as a resource, increasingly presenting images of the United States and its allies in order to depict Islam as inherently peaceful, and the United States and its allies as inherently war-seeking."

Islamism and Anti-Americanism in Central Asia

EDWARD SCHATZ

Is political Islam on the rise in Central Asia? One widely respected observer sees militant jihad an increasing possibility in the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.[1] Yet this leap of imagination is made possible only by focusing on areas where such radical sentiment has already arisen. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan—named in 2000 to the United States State Department's list of terrorist organizations and singled out by President George W. Bush in the early months of the antiterror campaign for its links to Al Qaeda—is estimated to have no more than a few thousand followers. And the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, which participated in parliamentary elections in 2000 after a brutal civil conflict in the mid-1990s, received only 7.5 percent of the vote. Although the potential for significant Islamism exists in Central Asia, it is far from the contemporary reality of the region.

Nonetheless, Islamic radicalism is not entirely absent. Successful radical mobilization in Central Asia taps what at first might appear an unusual ideological current. Islamists who manage to link their agendas to popular perceptions about United States foreign policy or American cultural products gain more support than those who do not. Anti-Americanism appears to contribute, sometimes profoundly, to the appeal of radical religious solutions to contemporary regional problems.

CREATING ISLAMISTS

Political Islam has little indigenous resonance in Central Asia. Central Asians traditionally adhered to versions of Islamic practice with certain syncretic peculiarities. This was true of the Uzbeks and Tajiks, where text-based Islam found greater resonance, and of the formerly nomadic Turkmen, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz, for whom Islamic practice overlay shamanistic and animistic beliefs. Thus, even before Soviet control of the region, Islam had become a marker that distinguished ethnic groups from Russian colonizers; many self-proclaimed defenders of Islam were in fact pursuing a classically ethnonationalist agenda.

Despite attempts in the 1980s and 1990s to effect an Islamic "awakening," Islamic practices had become seriously attenuated in many parts of the region after 70 years of official Soviet atheism. As a result, radical movements turned to transnational "master frames"—that is, interpretive schemata that sort information, allowing potential movement supporters to understand their world in novel ways—at the same time that they fished abroad for organizational support and financial assistance. And in the 1990s numerous states—from Saudi Arabia to Egypt to Iran to Pakistan—showed their willingness to support the activities of Islamists within the former Soviet Union.[2] While helpful on a practical level, this support was popularly understood as alien to the region; consequently, relatively few local Central Asians could claim ownership of its ideas.

EDWARD SCHATZ *is an assistant professor of political science at Southern Illinois University. This essay is adapted from a paper delivered at the August 2002 meeting of the American Political Science Association in Boston.*

[1]Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

[2]See Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower, *Islam and Central Asia: An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving Threat?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2000).

Notwithstanding the belief of the region's authoritarian presidents that Islamists lurked behind every corner, the activities of Salafis and Wahhabis found followers only in limited parts of Central Asia.[3]

Islamism did grow in importance in Central Asia throughout the 1990s, but the extent of its influence should not be overstated. Central Asia has a tradition of religious tolerance and moderation without a political orientation. Political Islam became relatively strong only in Tajikistan and the Ferghana Valley region (which encompasses parts of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).

In Tajikistan, self-proclaimed Islamists who formed the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) were a major factor in the civil war that wracked the country between 1992 and 1996. But the depth of popular support may be less impressive than it would otherwise seem, since Islam, like democracy, became an idiom through which opposition to the Communist-oriented regime of President Imomali Rakhmonov was expressed. Much of the Islamists' strength came through links to mercenary forces from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.[4] In fact, after the peace settlement in 1997, public support for radical Islam fell. The IRP's meager vote count in the 2000 parliamentary elections translated into two seats in the legislative body. In 2002, however, the activities of Hizbut-Tahrir—which advocates the establishment of an Islamic government through peaceful means—were reported to be on the rise in northern Tajikistan.

In neighboring Uzbekistan, where President Islam Karimov assumed power in 1989 and immediately began an anti-Islam campaign, the picture is more complicated. The list of events that the Uzbek government considers evidence of radical Islam is long. Chief among them is the attempt on Karimov's life in February 1999, which officials attribute to former members of the Uzbek branch of the IRP, Juma Namangani and Tahir Yoldash, who would later create the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Taking advantage of porous borders, the IMU in the summer of 1999 crossed from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan, taking hostage four Japanese geologists and eight Kyrgyz soldiers. They repeated the pattern with another incursion in the summer of 2000. In Tajikistan the IMU found a welcome home in the Karategin Valley, which was dominated by Islamist opposition leaders and—before the fall of the Taliban, at least—had been a hotbed of foreign-born field commanders.

The American-led military campaign in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002 disrupted the IMU's activities. Namangani was reported killed in a United States attack in November 2001 (reports continued to circulate in the region, however, that a close relative of his, rather than Namangani himself, died). Yoldash remained at large. The United States military campaign also tested the IMU's ability to finance operations through drug trafficking. Profoundly disrupted, the IMU has attempted to regroup in the Garm Valley of mountainous eastern Tajikistan.

In Kyrgyzstan, sympathy for radicalism was limited to the Kyrgyz portion of the Ferghana Valley; Islamists were primarily ethnic Uzbeks who felt they were the victims of discrimination by Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev. Along with Kazakhs and Turkmen, Kyrgyz are from a nomadic tradition whose embrace of orthodox Islam was partial, if not superficial. In Kazakhstan, more remote from the regionally destabilizing Afghanistan conflict and buoyed economically by its wealth of extractive resources, Islamism was limited to the southern Zhambyl and South Kazakhstan regions.

Thus, Islamism was a force among many in Central Asia, but the region's leaders routinely exaggerated its influence. Uzbekistan's Karimov in particular legitimized his rule on fear of an Islamic "threat," jailing thousands of political prisoners. With its campaign against Al Qaeda and the Taliban, the United States performed an about-face with regard to Karimov. Once his human rights abuses were widely condemned; by 2002 they were ignored, since Uzbekistan had become a strategic "partner." Even President Nursultan Nazarbaev in more remote Kazakhstan raised the specter of transnational Islam to paint himself as the best logical alternative to radicalism.

Islamism thus did not find much resonance in Central Asia in the early 2000s. Local beliefs rarely squared with the radical ideologies that some state and nonstate foreign actors sought to import to the

---

[3]The terms, especially Wahhabi, are widely used—and quite imprecisely so—in Central Asia as synonyms for "fundamentalists." Wahhabism was born as a puritanical movement in eighteenth-century Arabia. Salafism began as a reformist movement under Muhammad Abduh at the end of the nineteenth century. It became synonymous with theological conservatism largely through the interpretations of Abduh's ideological successor, Rashid Rida, and its adoption by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. (See John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 129–132.) Only in Dagestan (a republic in the Russian Federation) has Wahhabism been practiced relatively openly.

[4]On the ways in which the Tajik IRP desperately sought, but ultimately botched, its transnational connections, see Olivier Roy, *The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2000).

region. Nonetheless, its weakness could be compensated through a marriage of ideational currents between radical Islam and the master frame of anti-Americanism (or its ideological cousins, anti-Westernism and antiglobalism).

MAKING ANTI-AMERICANISM THE FOCUS

Popular perceptions of the United States vary widely across Central Asia, but to the extent that grievances can be framed with reference to cultural Americanization and the exercise of United States political influence, Islamic radicalism has a powerful ideological fellow traveler. The explosion of pro-American popular sentiment in the years immediately following the Soviet collapse had subsided by the mid-1990s, giving way to more polarized views of the West and to the reinvigoration of anti-American sentiment. In this sense, political Islam is, like Russian fascism, a local form of mobilization that taps a larger master frame. The fact that European fascists, environmentalists, antiglobalists, Islamists, economic nationalists, and antigovernment white supremacists can agree on anything is testimony to existence of anti-Americanism as a master frame with flexible appeal. The core views of these varied groups may be essentially inconsistent; they are united by the insistence that their movement goals work to curb global American influence.

That anti-American sentiment exists broadly is no longer surprising. Not only the very acts committed on September 11, 2001, but also the reactions to them, are telling. The typical pattern among commentators and observers around the world was to express deep sympathy for the victims of the tragedy, to pronounce terrorist tactics deplorable and morally indefensible, and then to explain the events as offering the United States its "just desserts." In unusual cases (the Palestinian territories, for example) some celebration occurred in the streets—which tells us something about popular attitudes in those contexts. But a general ambivalence—sympathy for the victims, coupled with lack of sympathy for the United States as a whole—played itself out across the planet.[5]

The reaction in Central Asia was similarly ambivalent. Ordinary people in Kazakhstan offered condolences but conveyed a feeling that the United States was receiving its comeuppance. In Tashkent, Uzbekistan, at a small anti-American rally that was quickly halted by police, a woman reversed the rhetoric of terrorism, criticizing United States President Bush and Uzbek strongman Islam Karimov: "Bush is the No. 1 terrorist in the world. . . . Karimov is terrorist No. 2. He let the Americans use our bases so that they could annihilate Muslims."

Immediate reactions aside, an alternative (although fanciful and completely unfounded) hypothesis spread: that Israel and its Western allies were behind the attacks. In June 2002, news reports filtered to Central Asia that the FBI and perhaps President Bush had critical information that might have prevented the September events. This led to the rumor that Bush himself had coordinated them. After all, the reasoning went, the terrorist bombings allowed the United States to pursue its foreign policy interests without serious obstacles; it was therefore in Bush's interests to have orchestrated the attacks in the first place.

THE SOURCES OF ANTI-AMERICANISM

Anti-Americanism in Central Asia arose from three general sources. First, after a decade of grand promises of economic and political "transitions" that would bring prosperity, most of the region's citizens felt a degree of resentment toward the West, its model of economic and political development, and the local regimes believed beholden to Western capital and interests. Those citizens who benefited from their ties to the West (especially those in the oil and gas industries), and a small middle class often employed in international organizations, predictably felt different. But, by any measure—economic or political—most Central Asians lived in worse conditions than they had during the Soviet period. Much of this resentment stemmed from unrealistic expectations that were subsequently disappointed, and much of it was directed at the West.

Anti-Americanism took a variety of forms. In Kazakhstan, where a massive privatization of the oil and gas industries brought large-scale foreign participation in those sectors, the activities of transnational companies—whatever their origins—were often marked as "American." In the minds of most Kazakhs, the export of resources (seen to profit not locals, but the holders of unmarked foreign bank accounts) was tantamount to the plundering of national wealth. As antiglobalists picketed in still-limited numbers, oil companies such as Chevron or Hurricane Hydrocarbons did little to enhance their local image by hiring itinerant workers from Russia or Turkey rather than local Kazakhs.

[5]For a general catalog of immediate reactions, see Peter Ford, "Why Do They Hate Us?" *Christian Science Monitor,* September 27, 2001.

The products of United States culture generated unease as well. Widely available, the American videos that made their way to Central Asia seemed to glamorize drinking, guns, and sex. Initially, the former Soviet subjects were more than happy to be inundated by these previously forbidden goods, but even by the mid-1990s many were starting to show profound ambivalence toward them. If United States dominance of the marketplace for other goods was considered acceptable, its monopoly on culture and values promotion through films appeared offensive. Rather than being religious puritanism, the resulting anti-Americanism was a commentary on the nihilism and absence of community values that United States movies were seen to promote. Soviet-era films, for all their Orientalist depictions of the Muslim world, were nonetheless closer in culture and spirit to Central Asian realities than were American films.

Moreover, anti-American attitudes had roots in the Soviet period. Even organizations unrelated ideologically to communism, such as the IRP of Tajikistan, were organizationally modeled in part after the Communist Party. On the ideological front, the perception that the United States had failed to rescue the economies and polities of the former Soviet Union revived several Soviet-era stereotypes. First, as many in the region noted with irony, the inundation of foreign economic interests seemed to confirm Lenin's assertion that imperialism was the "highest stage of capitalism." The United States did not provide a Marshall Plan for the former socialist bloc; instead, it sent its capitalist vanguard to plunder the region's resources. Second, the United States had no moral qualms about creating international alliances and fostering an overall security environment to guarantee its economic interests. Third, and contrary to the rhetoric from Washington, the United States was not particularly interested in promoting democracy; it instead sought marriages of convenience to achieve long-term economic domination. Finally, the United States was a place of decadence and a source of global immorality. In a sense, Soviet depictions of the United States had come to seem remarkably accurate.

None of this should create the impression that anti-Americanism was the predominant sentiment among Central Asians. Public opinion polls indicated that attitudes toward the United States remained generally positive (although it is difficult to know the intensity or durability of that positive feeling). Still, anti-Americanism was one ideological current running through the Central Asian republics, and it found particular harmony with local attempts to frame radical Islam and thereby mobilize the public.

FRAMING ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

With the exception of parts of the Ferghana Valley and Tajikistan, the particular Islam practiced in Central Asia was, by itself, not prone to radicalization. Two contingent factors, however, somewhat shifted the character of local beliefs and practices: an "identity moment" and the poor performance of the region's regimes.

The collapse of the Soviet state was fed by a resurgence of interest in pre-Soviet collective identities. The Soviet Union had deeply institutionalized ethnonationalist attachment throughout its territory, but in Central Asia and the Caucasus, subethnic clan and tribal attachments and supranational religious identities also experienced renewed interest. The period from the late 1980s into the 1990s was a moment of feverish attempts to discover, recreate, or create anew identities presumed to be culturally authentic.

Authorities in Uzbekistan drummed up an Islamic "threat" to justify regime-sponsored torture.

A search for Islamic identity was a critical part of this identity movement in Central Asia. In the 1990s, only about 100 mosques were operating in Central Asia. The Koran had been published in small print-runs and less than six times before 1984. Yet between 1991 and 2001, Kazakhstan saw the number of Muslim societies rise from 134 to 5,000. The return to religion brought the number of Russian Orthodox societies from 62 to 220, and the activities of Roman Catholics, Protestant groups (especially Baptists and Pentecostals), and Jehovah's Witnesses also expanded dramatically in Kazakhstan.

That religion played an insufficient role in society after 70 years of official atheism was a broadly held opinion. A poll taken in 1992 and 1993 by the United States Information Agency asked respondents to agree or disagree (strongly or somewhat) with the statement: "The teachings of Islam should play a larger role in [country] than they do today." In Uzbekistan, 53 percent agreed (strongly or somewhat). In Kyrgyzstan, 62 percent agreed. In more multiethnic Kazakhstan, 36 percent agreed. Considering only those from the titular group

(thus excluding non-Muslims, especially the numerically large Slavic population), 60 percent of Uzbeks, 71 percent of Kyrgyz, and 52 percent of Kazakhs agreed. A professed surge of interest in religion was thus part of this more general search for collective identity.

But if the language was often of a "return" to pre-Soviet religious identity, the reality was quite different. Official atheism had deeply affected the practice of religion: entire segments of the population infused religious and spiritual meaning into Soviet institutions, while others abandoned religion entirely. Ignorance of one's traditional cultural background (what came to be known as *mankurtism*, or a loss of cultural memory) meant that any such "return to religion" could be filled with new content. This was most evident in Kazakhstan, where a myriad of non-Islamic beliefs competed daily for adherents who had never felt deeply Muslim to begin with. Thus, with the identity movement came an opportunity: mobilizers were relatively less beholden to local religious beliefs, because the latter were in many cases not deeply felt.

Political Islam has little indigenous resonance in Central Asia.

A second contingent factor was the poor performance of the region's political leaders, leading to wider criticisms by oppositionists. Apart from Kyrgyzstan, which flirted with democratic institutions before backsliding notably in the late 1990s, the Central Asian regimes failed to provide political freedoms and protect civil liberties. Sultanistic rule in Turkmenistan put much of state and society at the mercy of an unpredictable leader. Authorities in Uzbekistan drummed up an Islamic "threat" to justify regime-sponsored torture. The region's "softer" authoritarian, Kazakhstan's Nazarbaev, dressed up classical patrimonial rule and an extensive network of patronage in the language of democratic institutions and modern economic relations.

These shortcomings on the political front, combined with deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, created an opportunity for Islamists to frame their struggle as an alternative to the existing abuse of power. In the case of Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov (ironically, the region's leading opponent of political Islam), painting regime corruption as rooted in a secular, Western orientation was relatively easy. After all, President Karimov consistently jailed ordinary pious Muslims, whom he accused of collaborating with radicals. Islamists could thus portray themselves as the victims of a cruel regime intent on preventing effective Islamic forms of governance from emerging in Uzbekistan. And, since Karimov had been raised in an orphanage in Samarkand and had limited contact with traditional society, branding him a secular "other" was rather easy. Further, his attempts to control flows of information merely lent plausibility to the idea that a viable alternative was being repressed.

HOW ISLAMISTS TAP ANTI-AMERICANISM

This failure of Western models of economic relations and governance gave rise to calls for authentic, culturally appropriate alternatives in Central Asia—and the tapping of anti-American themes. In their recruitment efforts, the transnationally active Hizbut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (as well as the Tajik IRP) framed their efforts so that they were able to use Soviet-era anti-Americanism as a resource, increasingly presenting images of the United States and its allies in order to depict Islam as inherently peaceful, and the United States and its allies as inherently war-seeking.

At the forefront of the attempt to discredit modern nation-statehood as anti-Islamic was Hizbut-Tahrir (HT). Vaguely calling for a restoration of the caliphate, the last of which fell in 1924 with Kemal Ataturk's reforms in Turkey, it "uses a blend of indigenous history, arguments about local socio-economic and political conditions and calls for international Islamic solidarity to advance its case for a struggle against authorities and establishment of a more egalitarian caliphate."[6] Although HT adherents apparently have not conceptualized specifically how governance under a caliphate would operate, the need for an Islamic form of governance is continually stressed.

Hizbut-Tahrir not only portrayed the caliphate as a form of government appropriate to the region, it also depicted an opposition between this Islamic model and Western nation-states. Well before September 2001, HT equated a return to original Islam with a rejection of alternative Western models for economy, society, and polity. Rhetoric was consistently anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and anti-Shia.

[6]International Crisis Group, "The IMU and the Hizbut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign" (January 30, 2002) <www.intl-crisis-group.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=538>.

The IMU also relied on calls to indigenous authenticity. IMU ideologues advocated not Islamic government through the caliphate, but the creation of an Islamic state in Uzbekistan.(In 2001 it was reported that the IMU had been renamed the Islamic Movement of Turkistan—which would have signaled a shift to notions of a geographically broader form of Islamic government in the region.) In such a state, according to literature directed at movement followers, "All foreign ties dissolve (*obryvaiutsia*) and are built only in an Islamic way (*v islamskom poriadke*). Will there be banks? There will be, [but] only in the Islamic way (*poriadok*)." The IMU's literature fundamentally divided the world into believers and unbelievers (*tawagheet*) and called on the former to defend Islam against the latter. Since actual indigenous forms of governance remained a distant memory because they had not been practiced in Central Asia for more than a century, these claims to authenticity found some adherents.

The calls to authenticity were nonetheless made in a flexible manner that allowed the movements to tap Soviet-era ideologies. This is most striking in the case of the HT, which at times displayed liberal notions of proper gender relations. Hizbut-Tahrir *fatwas* (decrees) allowed women to hold seats in parliament, shake hands with men, and even kiss in public. These concessions were justified as serving the overall injunction to work toward the restoration of the caliphate, allowing HT to tap Soviet-era norms about gender relations in everyday life and gender equity in professional spheres. Similarly, the very vagueness of the injunction to restore the caliphate recalls Soviet commands to create communism; as in Soviet propaganda, both the means and the ends for building the elusive "bright future" were left unspecified. Hizbut-Tahrir was especially keen not to contradict Soviet-era norms, since its social base came largely from the ranks of the educated, including those with degrees from prestigious institutions. This educated stratum was highly Russified and Sovietized, so HT's framing appears to have been intentional. If there seemed a logical contradiction between Soviet-era norms (influenced by official atheism) and a Muslim identity, it was not deeply felt.

With the growth of technologies that sped images of distant actors across the globe, the United States and its allies entered the framing strategies of Islamists with greater frequency, slowly displacing references to Russia and the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, anti–United States rhetoric was all but absent. French scholar Olivier Roy, in his discussion of the Tajik IRP, shows that the party's *Nejat* newspaper (which published from March to September 1992, when the civil war brought it to an end) offered only the mildest reference to the United States, saying that it and the West misunderstood Islamic movements and used double standards with regard to democracy.

Before 2001, anti-American rhetoric was largely HT's domain. The group's web site offered editorials that lambasted the United States role in the Middle East, calling it a "state terrorist that must be driven from the Muslim world." But the anti-Americanism of HT was generally inaccessible to most Central Asians. Even for those with Internet access, the events of the "Muslim world" were too remote to resonate. For much of the 1990s, the United States was a familiar actor on the world stage, but a distant one.

After the military defeat of the Taliban in the winter of 2001, radical sympathizers dispersed and patterns of recruitment changed. In particular, those who had operated openly in Tajikistan and clandestinely in parts of Uzbekistan now found it difficult to continue their work; many moved elsewhere—to Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. (Evidence shows that many HT cells moved to more remote Kazakhstan, with its relatively liberal—but far from guaranteed—space for religious freedom.) In their new locales, they stepped up anti–United States and anti-Semitic leafleting efforts. Hizbut-Tahrir literature found in April 2002 in economically depressed Kentau city in the South Kazakhstan region began to reflect the messages initially accessible to Central Asians only through its web site: "People who abide by the *shariat* of God, restore the religion of Islam, and spread it throughout the world will replace the pliant [*poslushnye*] leaders. They will erect a unified caliphate instead of those who helped Jews to assume power."[7]

The IMU likewise stepped up its anti-American framing in the late 1990s. In excerpts from undated recruitment literature, seemingly contradictory imagery is used to depict a threat to authentic Islam. In one drawing, the United States, Russia, and Israel, fused together as a venomous-looking snake, are swallowing Tajikistan and are poised to consume Uzbekistan. Other symbols include swastikas and one in which the hammer from the

[7]See Igor Savin, "Hizb-ut-takhrir v luzhnom Kazakhstane: sotsial'nyi portret iavieniia" (Paper presented at the conference Globalizatsiia i dialog konfesii v Tsentral'noi Azii, June 21, 2002), p. 8. "Those who helped Jews" is a clear reference to the United States.

Soviet flag is replaced by a sword. "Without the sword there is no Islam," claims the literature.[8]

Central Asian Islamists attempted broadly to frame their movements as peace oriented and to contrast the United States and its allies as benefiting from war. Hizbut-Tahrir traditionally was a strong advocate of nonviolent tactics, and since it sought to offer an authentic version of Islam, it was making the case that Islam was inherently peace oriented. Thus, it made frequent reference to world events—from Algeria and Palestine to Chechnya—painting Muslims as the victims of infidel aggression and portraying peace initiatives as emanating from the morally pure stance of Muslim actors. Ironically, the United States administration's "us/them" rhetoric in fall 2001 merely reified the division between believer and infidel. President Bush's ill-conceived (and subsequently retracted) use of the term "crusade" lent further credibility to Islamists' depictions. Even many Central Asians who deplored radical Islam claimed that Muslims were inherently incapable of orchestrating the events of September 11; they must, the logic went, have been committed by nonbelievers.

Hizbut-Tahrir benefited from its depiction of a distance between its tactics and those of the enemies of Islam. After the IMU's incursions into Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000, which discredited it in the eyes of much of the local population, HT came increasingly to be seen as the carrier of authentically peaceful Islam—which was a viable political alternative to local regimes. A notable symbiosis emerged between the IMU and HT; the latter could preach peace, even as it did nothing to exclude the possibility of violence. Some of its membership overlapped with that of the IMU; thus, nonviolent and peaceful orientations and agendas intermingled.

Despite its worldwide visibility, the United States had been a relatively distant actor for Central Asians before the war in Afghanistan. Anti-American framing necessarily tapped other strains of logic—whether anti-Semitism or orientations against the leadership of corrupt Central Asian regimes. But the association of local regimes with the United States grew in 2002; United States military personnel were allowed to use Central Asian air space, transport facilities, and air bases (at Tuzel and Hanabad in Uzbekistan; Kulyab, Kurgan-Tyube, and Khojand in Tajikistan; Bishkek and Kant in Kyrgyzstan; and back-up options in Almaty and Shymkent in Kazakhstan). The United States had already been a recognizable symbol; its presence in the region made it more tangible, thus making attempts to tap anti-American master frames all the more meaningful.

CONTINUED RADICALIZATION?

Political Islam has shallow ideational roots in Central Asia. Radical mobilizers therefore came to rely on transnational "master frames" to develop a following. Specifically, Islamists sought to use anti-Americanism to link the lived experience of ordinary Central Asians with that of other Muslims around the world, and—more diffusely—with that of others who felt resentment against the United States.

What this means for the future of Islamism in Central Asia is impossible to predict. The evolving role of the United States in the region, the outcome of uneven state-building efforts in neighboring Afghanistan, the results of any United States image-making efforts, and the ability of local regimes to build effective political systems and economic structures are among the many factors that will weigh heavily on any future trajectories for Islamism in the region. Moreover, while anti-Americanism may not be a necessary or sufficient condition for mobilization, it is increasingly likely to contribute to radicalism. This may be especially true in the Muslim world, whose varied strands of culture weave a metanarrative of identity that treats the West (and its paragon, the United States) as the "other."

Finally, the scope and salience of anti-Americanism in Central Asia varies. At this unipolar moment, the United States is doomed to be a reference point around the world; whether a representation with positive or negative connotations, it is almost universally recognized as a symbol. But in large part the content of that symbol hangs in the balance of United States efforts consciously to shape its popular image abroad. ■

---

[8]See Bakhtiar Babadzhanov, "Teologicheskoe obosnovanie l etapy dzhikhada v dokladakh lslamskogo dvizheniia Uzbekistana" (Paper and visual presentation presented at Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe conference, Islam and National Security in Central Asia, Almaty, Kazakhstan, June 24–25, 2002), p. 8.